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New directions in studying policies of international student mobility and migration

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ABSTRACT

Many host-countries have liberalised migration policies to facilitate the transition of international students to the local labour market as they are seen as economic agents who increase global competitiveness and integrate easily. However, how migration and educational policies at the regional and national levels emerge, are negotiated and become implemented, and how they contradict other policies, remains little-known. This special issue aims to address that gap. This introductory paper offers an analytical framework for studying policies of international student mobility that addresses four critical dimensions: discourses, contexts, agents and temporalities before offering some key avenues for future research.

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Introduction

Over the past decades, international student mobility and migration (ISM) has significantly increased, both in numbers and political, economic and academic significance, thus becoming a key field of study in migration research (Van Mol 2014). The received wisdom on this topic is that students are solicited for the competitive edge they offer in a global knowledge economy (King and Raghuram 2013). Consequently, it is not surprising that many receiving countries in the global North facilitate education-to-work transitions of international students after graduation. After all, such facilitation allows them ‘to fill skill shortages with locally trained foreign students who also expand the demand for goods and services and add to gross national production’ (Gribble 2008, 25). A recent study in the United Kingdom, for example, showed that international students generated £25.8 billion in gross output for the UK economy in 2014–2015 (Universities UK 2017). International students are also beneficial for higher education institutions: they pay higher tuition fees than national students, generating a significant source of income to higher education institutions in times of budget cuts. It has been estimated, for example, that 14% of total university income in 2014–2015 in the UK can be attributed to the tuition fees paid by international students (Universities UK 2017). Consequently, it is not surprising that international students now form part of a considerable migration industry, which comprises international student recruitment teams, international education agents, and other institutions selling an international education (Beech 2018). However, the actual processes of policy making and the context and contradictions of the different policies influencing ISM surprisingly remain a black-box (Riaño and Piguet 2016). This also holds true more generally for the analysis of migration policy, which is a nascent field in migration studies (but see for example Boswell 2007; Boswell, Geddes, and Scholten 2011; Boswell and Hampshire

2017) on which comparatively little work has been conducted so far. This special issue aims to fill this gap: through an in-depth analysis of ISM-policies we aim to highlight both the broader issue of migration policy building and the specificities of international student mobility and migration policies.

We contend that an analysis of ISM-policies, both at the institutional and national levels, is necessary as students' motivations to move across international borders are shaped by the scope of action created by government policies and the policies of higher education institutions (Raghuram 2013). However, this raises questions about how new policy initiatives acquire sufficient legitimacy, the varying character of government and institutional policies across national contexts, as well as what the implications may be for students in terms of trajectories, their learning and socio-economic integration experiences in the host countries. As such, this special issue makes three main contributions to the international migration literature.

First, this special issue focuses on the development of policies, from conception through phases of contestation and negotiation, to final implementation. Contemporary states are faced with the challenge of how to regulate migration in the face of economic forces that push them toward greater openness (Findlay 2011; Universities UK 2017), while political logic and security concerns push them simultaneously toward closure (Hollifield 2004). As a result, politicians' discourses about migration are often more restrictive than the finally implemented policies (Natter 2018). The rationale underlying policies of openness is that students' host country credentials and language proficiency will make their integration in the labour market relatively easy (Scott et al. 2015). Moreover, the higher fees that these students pay keep the costs of state education down (Brunner 2017; Findlay 2011). However, this attachment to neoliberal imperatives is not shared by everyone in policy making. For example, at the beginning of 2018 a public debate emerged in the Netherlands whereby the growing number of international students is considered as a problem by some actors in the academic landscape and policy-makers (see for example Bouma 2018; Truijens 2018). Similar debates arose in other contexts as well (see for example Riaño, Lombard, and Piguet 2018 this issue on the Swiss context and Van Mol 2015 on Flanders). As a result, individuals and groups have to lobby and negotiate to make specific policies possible. Moreover, there is no clear policy coherence between integration policies and migration policies regarding international students (see, for example, O'Connor 2017), and this incoherence has specific outcomes for their experiences and choices. Therefore, rather than a mere focus on the outcomes of pre-given policies, three papers in this special issue (França, Alves, and Padilla 2018; Lomer 2018; Riaño, Lombard, and Piguet 2018) analyse mobility policies as emergent and contested.

Second, there is little research in the migration literature on how national education policies intersect with migration policies. Also, the question of what is being taught, i.e., pedagogy and content of study (Madge, Raghuram, and Noxolo 2015), and how the experiences of students are affected by both educational policies and integration policies remains still underexplored. Furthermore, there are sometimes divergent normative viewpoints on how knowledge and pedagogic styles travel and are received as they cross borders (see for example Song and McCarthy 2018). As such, conflicting normative perspectives on what an ideal education should look like can shape the lived experience of students, their success and their future professional careers. Together, the papers in this special issue highlight how international students are subjected to multiple policies and norms at different levels (e.g., migration, higher education, individual, national, European). The papers by Song and McCarthy and O'Connor particularly contribute to this second set of questions.

Third, for a long time research on ISM has focused on Anglo-Saxon experiences. In this special issue, we broaden this perspective, by adding a comparative element on variations and similarities of ISM-policies beyond Anglophone countries. The papers in this special issue present case-studies of ISM-policies in Ireland (O'Connor 2017), Portugal (Franca et al.), Switzerland (Riaño, Lombard, and Piguet 2018), the UK (Lomer 2018), and Australia (Song and McCarthy 2018), as well as a comparative description of ISM-policies in France, Spain and the United Kingdom (Levatino et al. 2018). Bringing these together allows us to improve our understanding of the intersection of neoliberalism

and policy making, critically scrutinising whether the much discussed ‘Anglo-Saxon pattern’ also holds true for other contexts. We argue that analysing the spatio-temporal specificity of ISM-policies is important if we are to take the word ‘international’ in the ISM-literature seriously.

Together, the different contributions in this special issue indicate a number of directions for further empirical investigation, theorisation and for policy development in relation to international student mobility and migration. In this introductory paper we suggest three contributions for taking forward future research on ISM policies. First, we offer a typology of ISM-policies including those based around international education, migration management and migrant integration, which we argue should be brought together in order to understand how they mutually influence each other. Secondly, we argue that understanding ISM requires a comprehensive analytical framework, which addresses the most critical dimensions of study. In this paper we propose four dimensions: discourses, contexts, agents, and temporalities. On the basis of a literature review, and the contributions to this special issue, we give content to such analytical framework. Finally, we set out some key directions for future research.

Studying ISM-policies from the perspective of discourse, context, agents, and temporality

Focusing on discourses, contexts, agents and temporalities has great potential for advancing current understanding of ISM-policies. By focusing on these dimensions, several key questions arise. First, how do public and political discourses frame ISM-policies? Second, what is the role of institutional, local, national and international contexts in shaping ISM-policies? Third, who are the key agents driving ISM-policy change, and what are the implications of ISM policies for the lived experiences of international students? And finally, what is the historical background of ISM-policies, and what dynamics can be observed in terms of their development and negotiation?

Public and political discourses framing ISM-policies

According to Foucault (1971), the representations produced by public and political discourses create systems of signification that will acquire the status of ‘truth’, which can consequently be reflected in public policies. Recent approaches suggest that policy is the result of complex negotiations that largely occur within language and discourses (Goodwin 2011). The argument that migration policies are shaped by discourse has, however, only gained scholarly attention in recent decades (e.g., Bleich 2002; Boswell, Geddes, and Scholten 2011; Boswell and Hampshire 2017; Schmidt 2008, 2010, 2011). Menz (2016, 627) argues that ‘policy actors instrumentally use discourse to shape the policy debate, influence the agenda and legitimise certain policy choices’. For Menz, the concept ‘affords considerable analytical leeway in accounting for change, something other institutional approaches struggle with’.

Nevertheless, discourse analysis has rarely been used by studies on ISM policies (for some exceptions, see Lomer 2017, 2018; Menz 2016; Riaño, Lombard, and Piguet 2018). Based on the papers in this special issue and our review of the literature, we identify five different types of discourses on international students used by political elites to legitimise their policies: (a) as economic agents or drivers of knowledge and eventually of economic growth, (b) as sources of income for the higher education sector, (c) as temporary subjects, (d) as immigrants of doubtful value and (e) as part of soft power. Interestingly, despite the fact that some of these discourses are contradictory, they can also co-exist. They also shift depending on the political and economic interests of policy elites.

The portrayal of *international students as economic agents* is built around the claim that a global battle for talent is underway, in which countries with restrictive migration policies lose out in gaining access to an otherwise readily available global talent pool (Menz 2016). Skilled graduates, who have already acquired social and cultural experience in the host country, are portrayed as precious human capital to boost the host country’s economy. Consequently, an increasing number of industrialised

countries are re-tailoring their policies to retain highly-skilled foreign graduates (Chiou 2017; Geddie 2015; Hawthorne 2012; Robertson 2011; Suter and Jandl 2006). The paper by Riaño, Lombard, and Piguet (2018) on discourses mobilised by policy elites in Switzerland during parliamentary debates contributes to explaining why policy liberalisation towards international students from countries outside Europe is possible during times of strict migration management. Indeed, Swiss policy elites mobilise an economic and utilitarian discourse that challenges the view that *international students are temporary subjects*, and legitimises their selectiveness towards migrants who supposedly contribute most to economic growth. This result illustrates how migration policies have shifted from ethnic selection to selection by human capital (Joppke 2005). Further, it also draws attention to the importance of studying how migration policy changes from a restrictive to a more liberal stance, which remains relatively underexplored (Menz 2016).

The narrative of *students as sources of income for the higher education sector* is a result of higher education institutions capitalising on the opportunity to recruit international students as alternative sources of revenue to ensure their financial sustainability (Brooks and Waters 2011; Choudaha 2017). Such a narrative is particularly present among Anglo-Saxon countries (Geddie 2015) and extensively studied as the 'marketisation approach' to international education (Findlay 2010; Findlay, McCollum, and Packwood 2017). This is particularly strong in the Australian context as Song and McCarthy (2018) highlight. This marketisation agenda repositions the role of the state and of higher education institutions (HEIs). The former become arbiters and regulators of HEIs who are seen as providing goods to clients or customers. Keeping the product (education) marketable requires that it is also benchmarked against competitors and is evaluated and regulated. This involves both educational policies and actors who oversee codes and regulations to ensure that the source of income does not dry up. In some senses, then, perhaps ISM policies are unique in that education policies in this marketised world intersect with policies covering other tradeable commodities.

What is interesting about this narrative is that it can coexist with the idea that international students are *immigrants of doubtful value*. International students from certain source countries are thereby considered as potential labour migrants using a student visa as a back door to gain access to the (irregular) labour market of Western countries (see e.g., Van Mol 2008 on Chinese students). Two papers in this special issue, on public and political discourse on international students in the United Kingdom, by Lomer (2018) and by Levatino et al. (2018), unravel these contradictions. While portraying international students as sources of income for the higher education sector, they are also viewed as immigrants of doubtful value and as 'other'. Analysing such contradictory and co-existing discourses is important for future studies. Furthermore, while 'attracting the best and brightest' has become a popular mantra in European countries, in practice migration management often continues to be preoccupied with control rather than with facilitation of foreign students' study-to-work transition (Mosneaga 2015; Riaño, Lombard, and Piguet 2018). Based on the Irish example, O'Connor (2017) shows that migration policy is often used in practice as a way of controlling student mobility and limiting access to only the 'desired' type of student. Thus, although policies on international students may have been liberalised in several national contexts, they are clearly not immune to conflicts such as the rise of populist and nativist politics. The paradox of contemporary states seems to be that they can be open and inclusive to newcomers and simultaneously restrictive and exclusionary (Hampshire 2013). The emerging paradigm of managed migration combines the construction of more permissive channels for desirable migrants, such as international students, with ever more restrictive policies towards asylum seekers (Menz 2009) is familiar. The papers presented in this special issue suggest that even the same category of migrant, international student in our case, may be desired and rejected simultaneously.

Finally, the narrative of *international students as part of soft power* is also of great scholarly interest (Raghuram 2013). In the context of a fierce global battle for brains, governments increasingly consider higher education institutions as powerful instruments for projecting soft power and expanding their spheres of influence. The United States and China are good examples of this strategy

(Stetar et al. 2010). China's active recruitment of African university students seems to be an effort to increase its soft power in Africa as well as to generate income from education services (Haugen 2013). The shifts in soft power are explored by França, Alves, and Padilla (2018) within the context of Portugal. They show that Portugal encouraged the migration of a large number of students from its former colonies in Brazil and Africa in order to maintain its influence over the former colonies. The similarities of culture, language and history were used to cement a Lusophone diaspora but this was forced to morph and change as Portuguese membership of the EU put new and different pressures on the shape of education and migration. França, Alves, and Padilla (2018) provide an excellent exposition of how Portugal had to negotiate being at the centre of a Lusophone world alongside being the periphery of the European Union. It's differential power within two different forms of networks and how that shapes its student migration policies highlights what happens to soft power when power relations alter.

To conclude this section, ISM-policies should not merely be analysed and theorised as instruments of migration management in terms of controlling and/or managing the number of incoming and outgoing students, but also as powerful discursive frameworks that shape public policy. This is an important future direction of study, as shifting discourses clearly have an impact on the trajectories of international students, on their lived experiences, and on their subjectivities.

Contexts shaping ISM-Policies: convergence, divergence and contradictions

Social scientists are increasingly aware of the role that national, international and institutional contexts play in shaping public policy. Vanyoro (2015, 13) argues that context 'defines and shapes what issues are taken up on the policy agenda, who the key policy actors are, and ultimately how the policy making process is structured'. Vanyoro (2015, 14) further argues that national, international and institutional contexts are rarely taken into account when policy making processes are analysed. Geographers have emphasised the spatial contingency of the policy making process (Peck and Theodore 2010). They have traditionally privileged context-based analyses, examining the extent and nature of phenomena across countries and localities, and attempting to interpret differences in terms of political and cultural contexts (e.g., Massey 1984; Monk 1994).

Several papers in this special issue illustrate the importance of studying how policies are framed, negotiated and become implemented in different geographical contexts. Levatino et al. 2018 show that while attracting international students is the declared objective of France, Spain and the UK, an analysis of the evolution of student migration policies since the late 1990s suggests that despite common forces pushing towards convergence (i.e., international students viewed as 'living containers of knowledge'), country-specific factors, such as a countries' migration history and the political party in power, seem crucial in explaining important differences in the implementation of ISM-policies across the three countries. Policies are thus partially convergent at a global scale but also diverging at a local scale. This indicates the role of national power structures in influencing how partial convergence tendencies on an international/global scale are differently translated at a national, institutional and local level. It also suggests that more comparative research is needed into this process in order to expose *convergences and divergences*. Different discursive strategies can have 'very different impacts on programmatic ideas and public philosophies' (Boswell and Hampshire 2017, 134). ISM-policies are thus clearly embedded in specific geographical and temporal contexts.

Moreover, Riaño, Lombard, and Piguët (2018) show that despite striking similarities between the competitiveness discourse used by policy-elites in Anglo-Saxon countries and Switzerland to legitimise policy liberalisation towards international students, the Swiss case is unique. Since the Swiss state heavily subsidises the educational costs of international students, the main narrative of policy elites is on the return of public funds investments. The policy of forcing international students to leave Switzerland upon graduation implies losing millions of Swiss Francs of public funds to Switzerland's competitors. Furthermore, geography emerges as crucial factor of analysis. Being a small country where MPs serve only on a part-time basis, Switzerland is a favourable setting for initiators

of policy change, as they readily maintain contact with key stakeholders and are thus able to test the ground for change. These results point to the importance of studying how policies are discursively framed and implemented in national contexts other than Anglo-Saxon countries. Expanding the geographical scope of study may offer an alternative understanding to the marketisation perspective, which is primarily relevant to some of the Anglophone countries.

Furthermore, studying institutional contexts allows us to focus on the *tensions and contradictions* that may arise between different institutions involved in the policy-making process, an approach to studying policy-making, which has gained attention in the past decades (Guiraudon and Joppke 2001; Joppke 1998). The paper by O'Connor in this special issue exposes the contradictions within institutional ISM policies in Ireland, arising from the drive to recruit international students on the one hand, and the lack of diversity policies in a country where migration is a relatively recent phenomenon on the other hand. The drive to recruit international students sits alongside policies around surveillance, racialisation, increasing restrictions and divisive rhetoric towards non-EU students. This case study highlights the need to theorise ISM-policies as a process which exposes contradictions within nation states in terms of policies to respond to economic needs and policies regarding integration and cultural diversity. Focusing on tensions and contradictions also allows us to grasp how the experiences of international students are influenced by competing interests.

Agents of policy-making and the impact of policies on lived experiences

A third major contribution of this special issue is that the different papers together shine light on the different agents driving changes in ISM-policies, as well as how the implemented policies impact students' mobilities and lived experiences (see e.g., the papers of Lomer 2018, O'Connor 2017 and Riaño, Lombard, and Piguet 2018), an issue that has, thus far, received little attention in the literature. Lomer raises the question of how ISM-policies alter the mobility of international students in the UK. She shows that growth in student numbers, particularly in high ranking institutions, has coincided with proactive policies over the last 20 years, suggesting that policy discourses are linked to mobility. But policy targets were not met and growth has fallen since the 2010 tightening of migration policy. Nor was the target of diversifying source countries met, so the UK remains dependent on student demand from a few nations. This mixed success suggests that student mobility is easily deterred by migration policy, but other policies have little impact on the nature of demand. Furthermore, she highlights that policy discourses that construct international students as mere sources of income, or as immigrants of doubtful value, may be internalised by students, who learn to subjectify themselves.

Focusing on the case of Ireland, O'Connor illustrates the role higher education institutions play as key actors in selecting and attracting immigrants (also see Brunner 2017). Furthermore, O'Connor strives to present a nuanced representation of the experiences of international students that reveal the limitations of homogenising them (cf. King and Raghuram 2013). Despite generally having high language skills and educational levels, student migrants of various nationalities experience similar difficulties in integration as other migrants, including racialisation and marginalisation. Considering the diversity of their experiences and identities is thus important for advancing our conceptualisation of international students and the impact of ISM-policies. Such policies must emphasise the principle of recognising international students as a heterogeneous group who must also be supported to overcome discriminatory practices that limit their social integration.

The potential impact of policy narratives on international students is also illustrated by Riaño, Lombard, and Piguet (2018) for the Swiss case. In the narrative of the initiator of policy change before the Swiss parliament, students are represented as young, mobile, trained in fields such as engineering, biotechnology, medicine, and wealth management, and fully assimilated into Swiss culture. Moreover, only the masculine form is applied when referring to international students. Such a narrow representation of international students is reflected in the highly selective wording of the

final legislation. Only students whose prospective jobs are of particular scientific or economic interest to Switzerland are able to obtain a work permit in Switzerland after graduating. Giving attention to how policy narratives affect the experiences of international students is an important future direction of study to advance our understanding of the field.

In turn, Song and McCarthy (2018) show how government policies and higher education regulations in Australia over the past two decades have, paradoxically, moved to reinforce a Western-centric curriculum and pedagogy. Focusing on the case of Chinese international students they show how policies are embedded in a homogenised educational process via a regulatory state that is underpinned by both neoliberal and post-colonial ideologies. They argue that ‘critical thinking’ is used both as a totem pole to attract Asian students and a governmental yardstick to measure their academic performance. Inspired by postcolonial thought (Chakrabarty 2000), Song and McCarthy contend that the policy and practice of essentialising ‘critical thinking’ articulates Asian students as remedial learners, invoking Western critical thinking as part of a civilising undertaking to rescue them from their underdeveloped political and social systems. They call for a new educational paradigm that takes into account a transcultural approach to higher education.

If the state is to be considered an ‘agent’, the contributions in this special issue also make a contribution to advancing our ways of conceptualising the state. In that sense, interest-based accounts of migration policies, which portray the state as a simple broker passively reacting to the claims of different interest groups, such as local workers, capitalists and landowners (Shughart, Tollison, and Kimenji 1986) or employers, immigrant groups, local residents (Freeman 1995), appear as lacking theoretical complexity (Consterdine 2018). Riaño, Lombard, and Piguet’s (2018) study of competing discourses in parliamentary debates in Switzerland illustrates that the state cannot be simply thought of as a homogeneous entity, as members can have quite contradictory ideas about migration policies towards international students. For example, while members of the Swiss administration struggle to maintain the status quo of protectionist policies, members of Parliament strive to liberalise immigration policies for international students thus adapting to the global competition for skilled resources. Interestingly, they also show how policy change is not simply pushed forward by abstract actors within a state, but by specific individuals whose *biographical capacity* places them in a particularly advantageous position to effect policy change towards international students.

To conclude this section, further studies are needed that pay more attention to the different agents in the policy process, as well as the potential impact of ISM-policies on international students. Intersectional perspectives, which give attention to how the ‘intersection’ of gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and age may shape their differentiated experiences (e.g., Nash 2008; Riaño 2011), might be of particular relevance here.

Temporalities: ISM-Policies morphing and transforming over time

Contemporary public policies are clearly rooted in a country’s history. The value of this perspective is illustrated by França, Alves, and Padilla (2018), who show that Portuguese strategies to attract international students are historically rooted and respond to different demands and interests embedded in its geopolitical memberships. On the one hand, they are rooted within Portugal’s desire to continue its influence over former colonies. On the other hand, they respond to pressure from the European Commission to increase the internationalisation level within the European Higher Education Area. But the local context of the national state plays a bigger role than the supra-national level of the EU. That ISM-policies may be ingrained in neo-colonial logics is an important finding. It points to the importance of using postcolonial theoretical frameworks (e.g., Chakrabarty 2000; Raghuram, Madge, and Noxolo 2009) for policy analysis. At the same time, examining how colonial logics may be adapted and transformed in response to pressure from new global forces, seems an important future direction of study. Moreover, the paper highlights the importance of national educational policy as it intersects with migration policy and how both have altered over time. This is particularly

significant in the context of the growing hegemony of Anglophone educational systems internationally with the rise of the US in the post- Second World War world. Hence, the influence of the Portuguese colonial educational system within the Lusophony has to contend with the success of another colonial formation – the British colonial system and its aftermaths, as exemplified by the growing hegemony of Anglophone education globally (Raghuram, Madge, and Noxolo 2009). What is crucial here is that we need to recognise not only the influence of one country on another but more importantly the relations between different kinds of international groupings – Lusophony and Europeanisation for Portugal; Anglophony and Lusophony for the ex-colonies – and how these compete, articulate and complement each other. ISM policies are, thus, not national alone. The paper also shows the experimental nature of policy making; some higher education institutions try out regulations out and the rest then see what happens and follow it if it works. This emergent nature of policy-making highlights another nuance to notions of temporality that needs further investigation.

Levatino et al. 2018 in this special issue also contribute to studying ISM-policies from a historical perspective. Their analysis of how ISM-policies in France, Spain and the UK have evolved since the late 1990s reveal *continuities and discontinuities* over time. Importantly, such historical analysis allows us to study whether policies in the three countries have or have not converged, and the factors underlying these changes. The results show that changes in policies often go hand in hand with changes in the governing party or coalition. Supranational policy initiatives, e.g., in the form of EU directives, on student migration policymaking, have had limited impact. These results support previous findings for the UK that parties in government can have a greater impact on policy than previous studies have acknowledged but ‘in-depth process tracing’ is required (Hampshire and Bale 2015, 145). Future studies thus need to give detailed attention to how the changing political orientation of the governing party may influence policy-making over time.

The temporal contingency of the policy making process is further illustrated by França, Alves, and Padilla (2018), Levatino et al. 2018, and Riaño, Lombard, and Piguet (2018): they show how the globally circulating narratives at the outset of the twenty-first century about attracting international students to be globally competitive (cf. Geddie 2015), and the regulations implemented by the European Union in 2009 to facilitate the retention of third-country postgraduate students had a positive effect on policy change towards international students.

Furthermore, authors studying the history of public discourses on international students show their shifting nature as well as continuities over time (e.g., Van Mol and Morant i Ariño 2015). For example, a history of policies towards international students at French higher education institutions shows that in the early twentieth century, French authorities encouraged the arrival of foreign students. However, with the crisis of the 1930s, xenophobia and anti-Semitism became rampant (Morder and Rolland-Diamond 2012). Similarly, Gillibert and Riaño (2018) demonstrate that Swiss higher education institutions encouraged the arrival of international students at the beginning of the twentieth century to support their own expansion. Later in the century, however, these students were constructed as being a risk factor because of their high numbers, because they engaged politically, or because foreign female students desired to continue their profession after graduating, which contradicted society’s ideal at the time that academic women should give priority to their family lives (for a contemporary discussion of gendered aspects of couples involving an academic, see Schaer, Dahinden, and Toader 2017).

Conclusions

This special issue addresses a relatively new topic in the migration literature, namely policy-making processes related to international student mobility and migration – a topic which figures among the key concerns of contemporary nation states. Altogether, the various papers significantly expand our empirical and theoretical understanding of the intersection between international student migration policy and wider migration policies.

In this introductory paper, we contribute to international student mobility and migration policy analysis by proposing an original framework that addresses four critical dimensions of study: discourses, contexts, agents, and temporalities. The paper suggests that we can significantly advance our understanding of policies of international student mobility and migration by addressing four key questions. First, what kind of discourses are used by political elites and institutional agents to legitimise their policies? Second, what are the different national, international and institutional contexts that shape such policies? Third, which agents are involved in policy-making, and how do the implemented policies affect international students? Finally, what are the different temporalities in which policies arise and evolve over time? These are briefly summarised below.

First, studying *discourses* implies a shift of approach to understand ISM-policies not merely as instruments of migration management but also as powerful discursive frameworks that shape public policy. Furthermore, we highlight the importance of studying discourse for understanding why policy liberalisation occurs during times of strict migration management. Also, studying the extent to which contradictory and co-existing discourses may exist within individual states, and how this may illustrate the paradox of contemporary states to be open towards international students while simultaneously being restrictive, is also an important question for future research.

Second, future studies need to take local, institutional, national and international *contexts* into account when studying how ISM-policies are framed, negotiated and implemented. We believe it is important to investigate how ISM-policy-making might be affected by a country's geography, history of migration, political system, political force in power, and position in a global context. Furthermore, international students are subjected to multiple policies and norms at different levels, which might even be contradictory. Future studies thus need to examine the extent to which policies formulated by different institutions and at different levels might coexist or be contradictory and how they may respond to competing interests.

Third, examining the different *agents* at local, institutional, national, and international levels driving changes in ISM-policies, as well as how policy narratives, and the implemented policies affect students' mobilities and lived experiences, is also a promising avenue for future research. More studies are needed that recognise international students as a heterogeneous group, thus examining the differential impact of policies on different types of international students depending on their gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and age. Intersectional frameworks might be particularly informative here. Furthermore, as institutions of tertiary education move to reinforce a Western-centric curriculum and pedagogy on international students, scholars need to reflect on possible alternative policies using a transcultural approach to higher education. Future studies also need to recognise that studying the variety of agents involved in ISM-policy-making is helpful for understanding and conceptualising the state. The state cannot be simply considered as a homogeneous entity. It should rather be analysed as a conglomerate of agents using powerful narratives to push forward their own interests regarding ISM-policies. Finally, this approach also implies examining the biographies of how particularly influential agents of policy-making come to be in a particularly advantageous position to effect change.

Fourth, the *temporalities* of policy-making need to be addressed by paying attention to how policies evolved over time. This enables investigations into how evolving political orientations of the parties in power influence ISM-policy making, for example, and it also allows us to draw attention to post-colonial perspectives which critically examine to what extent ISM-policies might be ingrained in neo-colonial logics.

Finally, we suggest some *cross-cutting themes* that also emerge from the papers in this special issue. ISM policies are perhaps unique in that they occur at the confluence of migration policies and policies affecting the services industry, but where the services are sold to the migrant rather than provided by them. It is also a very competitive industry which morphs over time. So, we may ask, what do ISM policies have in common with other policies on serviceable goods? Who are the other actors, what are the contexts and types of discourses that come into play when education policy, and not only migration policy, are seen as central to ISM? Moreover, the student,

as subject to these multiple policies, also faces contradictory pressures so: how are these contradictory discourses, actions and their variations in different contexts weighed up by students during the pre-migratory phase, through the migration process and after migration, especially after study? And what kinds of subjects and subjectivities are formed through these policies? Finally, the question of different temporal rhythms involved in policy making, explored briefly here, as well as the temporalities of student mobility may not align. Policies alter, leaving students stranded, sometimes even abandoned? Researching ISM policies therefore requires, we argue, a sensitivity to the implications of the shifting policy scenario on the students themselves. How should those researching ISM policies position themselves as advisors and interlocutors of ISM policies and how could they use their fieldwork to alter the contexts and conditions of policy making? In short, what is the role of the engaged researcher of ISM policy in shaping thinking on ISM policies? These are issues that need further reflection.

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